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BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

853 asked to count the number of times she suckled her child over a week, reported that it varied between six and fifteen times a day. The time of each nursing varies, but it is admitted that the louder or longer the child cries the greater the time the mother expends on its suckling.

[091] The dress of women actually helps in nursing the child without delay immediately he cries. Either through the dress neck-opening, which is always cut low, or the two openings, one on each breast, the mother extrudes her breast for the child. Sometimes in the presence of female strangers, or very close male relatives, the child is nursed while covered with the top garment, the breast and the child hidden between the two garments. The mother usually offers the nipple between her middle and index fingers to the child who eagerly leans towards it and grasps it. The suckling child is allowed to play freely with his mother's breast, even while alternating from one breast to another. A mother nurses her child while she is sewing, spinning, cooking or even eating. When the child grows older it can induce its mother to nurse it by rubbing its head on her breast or by inserting its hand into one of the openings.

Usually the child suckles till it is satisfied, but it also happens that the nipple is withdrawn from it whenever the mother feels that it is satisfied, or when she has to engage on an immediate task, to give it the breast later. It is worthwhile noting that the child gets the breast either when it needs it or when the breast is full, and it is withdrawn from it when it is satisfied, or when its mother feels that she has got to withdraw her breast when circumstances of her work demand it. Yet the need of the child, even theoretically, is the overriding factor in suckling. Occasions of tantalizing with the breast are reported when mothers show or play about with their breast for their children, the game invariably ending with the suckler getting the breast. It is forbidden (haram) to deprive the child of the breast once it has been tantalized. Some women in the village are known to be neglectful of their children with regard to nursing. They are reported as saying that if they attend wholly to their children, as other women do, they would not be able to attend to their home tasks. Their justification for this is implicit in their famous saying, 'Even dogs, after all, have brought forth offspring'.

●862 The period of nursing, on the whole, varies from child to child and from mother to mother, depending on the health of the child or the arrival of the next baby, or on the mother's milk. No child is ever weaned before the end of the first year. Some children are suckled for two years and a few as long as three years. The average period for most children is between a year and a year and a half. It is reported also that very few mothers nurse two children at the same time, and this custom was more common about twenty years ago, when the period of suckling was longer on the whole.

853 842 It is felt in the village that there is a definite relationship between lactation and future pregnancy, and if a woman wishes to become pregnant

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she curtails her nursing period but never before the termination of the first year. In this case, the 'milking goat', whose milk is preferred to that of a cow, being 'lighter', would help in feeding the child. My female informant insisted that the contrary never occurs, that a woman prolongs her nursing period to prevent pregnancy. At this point the official ideology of women differs from that in Artas as stated by Granqvist in the following quotation:

'As it is generally assumed that nursing makes a new pregnancy more difficult it may be thought that the women use it in self-protection, to postpone the unwished-for pregnancy. Women's work is so hard that it is almost unbelievable that they should wish to be constantly bearing children.'

The writer has enquired whether the same is being practised in Silwa, but he was assured the opposite. His informant might have wanted to hide this fact, as the logical conclusion of the relationship between conception and lactation lends itself to its use in the self-protective way mentioned by Granqvist. The informant added that it is the child's indisputable right to suck as long as it wants, otherwise it would become obstinate and disobedient, and it is only to pursue the more desired aim of fresh pregnancy that the mother is obliged to curtail the nursing period.

It is also recognized that a boy is usually nursed less than a girl, which also differs from the custom in Artas. The purpose is that though both should be infused with the mother's compassion, the girl is supposed to be imbued with more of it than the boy, and consequently her nursing should be longer. Yet if a newly-married woman begets a girl in her first birth, the custom is to curtail her nursing period in order to hurry the next pregnancy in the hope of begetting a boy. The short period of boys' nursing compared to that of girls' is also a clear indication of the accelerating process of boys' growth. The case of the boy who is brought up by a widow and nursed for a long time is a proverbial one for 'his unreliability, his being easily swayed, and his inability to make up his mind'. Any person who evidences such character traits is designated as one who was brought up by a widow.[1]

The different claims of the patrilineal and the matrilineal sides on the infant express themselves in the assumed different attitudes between father and mother with regard to weaning. While mothers consider a long period of suckling as conducive to compassion, fathers regard it as 'darkening the infant's mind'. This difference in attitude towards weaning could be taken as a reflection of the matrilineal sentiment, contrasted with the paternal desire of subjecting the infant to social discipline as early as possible.[2]

What is also significant is the rigid observance of the nursing of the child by his relatives. One of the main injunctions of the Koran is the pro-

[1] It also means that he has not been disciplined by his father, as will be shown later.
[2] See Chapter II.

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who married a member of the carpenter family is usually a source of gossip and warning against such mixture. 582

In pursuing the subject of infant nursing, it is to be noted that the child does not rely entirely on mother's milk during all its nursing period, as after the fourth month it is introduced to premasticated adult food. The bits that cannot be swallowed are collected and inserted again in its mouth. Premasticated food is used more in the case of boys than girls, to help mother's milk in accelerating growth. 853

During nursing it is quite common to see a child sucking his fingers or pushing his fist into his mouth. He is actually encouraged in doing this by his mother, who sometimes puts her own finger into the child's mouth. The need is recognized more during the teething period, that is in the fourth or fifth month. For this purpose of sucking, the mother hangs a kind of loose string round the neck of the child with a bundle of hard stuff tied in a piece of cloth, and this is supposed to assist tooth-cutting. 856

When the mother starts weaning her child, she increases the amount of premasticated food given to it. She begins by weaning her child first from one breast, and later from the other. She stops milk from the breast by rubbing the nipple with a concoction of spices, ground sheep tripe, henna, cactus juice and salt stone. After 'stopping milk' the mother turns her dress back to front so that its neck and side openings hang at the back, the child thus finding no access to the breast. For the first two days of weaning, coloured hard-boiled eggs are given to the child to play with and then to eat, whenever he wishes. In psycho-analytical language, mothers in Silwa recognize weaning as a 'traumatic experience' for the child and do their best to absorb the child's attention in other directions, especially in play with other children or providing it with some delicacies of food. 862

The weaning must always be arranged in such a way that it is completed in two or three days before the beginning of the lunar month. It is believed to be very difficult to wean a child after the appearance of the new moon, and it must be left till towards the end of it. It is also believed that a woman who weans at the beginning of the month will find it difficult to bear children. This must be also observed in connection with the circumcision of girls, so that the girl will not become sterile or find it difficult to conceive. Here, one notes the striking relation between the moon and such social phenomena as weaning and circumcision. One might be led to infer that the moon must have been connected with fertility rites in some periods of Egyptian history. It is also observed by mothers that weaning of their children must not be declared immediately, but after a lapse of at least two weeks for fear of the evil eye, or 'pressure' on the mother's power to conceive. [821] [842] [304] [821]

The third basic need of the child, after the mother's bodily warmth and nursing, is the need for 'evacuation'. For the first four months (before the child can sit up) it is allowed to urinate and defaecate in a piece of cloth wrapped round its body from the waist to the knees, under its 854

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865 593 universal experience when a mother has more than one child in her own care'.[1] The peculiar side of it in this community is the way it is acknowledged and its use as an incentive in child development. In this treatment of the manifestations of sibling rivalry and the important part it plays in the formation of personality, no test of the Levy type was administered, but the cultural symbols and condensations were taken to offer ready-made data comparable to Levy's projective test.[2]

It is assumed in Silwa that the knee-baby is always jealous of the lap-baby, and the yard-baby is jealous of the knee-baby, and that this jealousy is irrespective of sex.[3] The absolute order of birth is maintained as the source of sibling rivalry and in the case of the death of the knee-baby, for example, the yard-baby will not be jealous of the lap-baby. The process is thus juxtapositional, each child always rivalling the immediately younger one who is 'above him' and who is also described as the one 'who pushes him away'. Jealousy is also believed to be one-way, as expressed in the [152] apprehensiveness of the older towards the younger, and not the converse, and therefore it is always the older who is jealous of the younger.

It is considered, according to one of my female informants, that sibling rivalry is essential in the process of a child's growth, particularly for the [853] boys. In the case of the first child, the mother usually induces him to suckle by offering her breast to a strange child. My informant went on to tell me of the folk story of the mother who had only one child and did 865 not bear any more. At the age of seven, however, her son displayed the physical and social maturity of a child of four, being a weakling who knew nothing about the world. This retarded growth worried his mother who consulted various people as to the best way of treating him. At last, she was advised by an old woman to send him to another household, which had many children in it, in another village and to keep him there for a year. During the first few weeks the boy used to sit with the other children round a dish of food, without getting sufficient to eat. Thus he was almost starved, his condition deteriorating. After that period, however, his rivalry with the other children was stimulated and he began to compete with them in eating, playing and running errands. Through this method his development accelerated, and as he became lively his mother took him back home.

It is believed that the arrival of a newborn baby helps to free the next [862] oldest baby from his mother and thus assist its weaning, otherwise it would 'stick to its mother's neck'. As the terminal baby, or, as it is sometimes

[1] See William Henry, 'The Thematic Apperception Technique in the Study of Culture-Personality Relations', in *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, Vol. XXXV. See also Susan Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children*, London, 1937.

[2] Benjamin D. Paul, 'Symbolic Sibling Rivalry in a Guatemalan Indian Village', in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LII, 1950, p. 205.

[3] These stages of child development are adopted by Margaret Mead, 'Age Patterning in Personality Development', in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. XVII, 1947, pp. 230–40.

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play group as a relative, or warned against joining them on the grounds of their being strangers.

Furthermore an age group can only extend itself, though not freely or without reserve, to the age group directly senior to it.[1] In other words, boys, for example, may be seen playing or sitting with adolescents or young unmarried men, but are not expected to mix with grown-up men. Adolescents and young men may also be seen sitting on the fringe of an adult gathering, though very infrequently. At night a man may be chatting with a group of older boys, but always sitting on the fringe of their gathering, as an indication of his aloofness. Such behaviour related to the three age groups in the village is expressed in the admonition that one 'should not exceed the limits in his behaviour'. For example, a boy who passes by a gathering of adults sprawling on the ground is not supposed to greet them, much less pass between them. Rikabi, a boy of twelve years, approached a meeting of neighbours near his home, and greeted them by saying 'Peace be upon you'. This action annoyed his father as well as the others, and provoked the father to reply: 'Go away, may peace crush you.' In this case, the boy was trying to act like a grown-up, but such precociousness is not the accepted behaviour from a boy of his age. Had he been seventeen or eighteen years his greetings would have been accepted and considered praiseworthy.

Terms of courtesy are not expected among the children themselves and avoidance is the best way of showing courtesy between adults and children. With the impact of urban life, polite children are expected to say 'Thank you' or 'May God increase your blessings' to their elders, while the latter seldom show their appreciation of the children's assistance for them, which if ever expressed would be couched in kinship terms such as 'May God increase thy blessings; thou art the master of thy uncle'.

The fourth characteristic of this period of childhood is the striking interest and respect of children for food. It is quite frequent to see boys and girls inside or outside the house holding in their hands a piece of bread or an onion and eating it while they play. They may be also seen tantalizing each other by the type of bread they have, priding themselves on their mother's good baking. Children, on the whole, tend to be preoccupied and interested in food. This shows itself in the children's ordinary conversation, in the amount of details they give in relating a folk story with food themes occurring in it, in their excessive delight in telling about a good meal that they had or that they are going to have. Feasts and ceremonies are first recalled as occasions for excessive good food. Even in both adults' and children's dreams, food is an important element in their manifest content.[2] Children prefer certain relatives to others because they offer them food and tea; they share food with those children whom they like and refuse to share it with those whom they dislike.

[1] See Chapter II for the three age groups in the village.
[2] See Appendix XI, 'A Note on Dreams', and Appendices VIII and X.

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THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

862 269 It was mentioned earlier that food is considered almost sacred and it was shown how this attitude towards it was instilled into the children. They call bread 'baraka' and swear by it.[1] Moreover, it is worth noting that while the children talk of, and display food freely, and have no shame about eating anywhere, adults are quite secretive and scrupulous about their food. The latter are wary of being exposed to the eye of a stranger while they are eating; they feel that if they do not ask the stranger to join them in the meal, he might have a bad effect on what they are eating. It is the custom to insist on any unexpected person joining them in eating even for one bite by saying, 'Come and say "In the Name of God".' The invited person in this case usually expresses his willingness to have a bite with the others to still any fear or suspicion, or says that he has just eaten, 'Thanks to God'. Food carried from the house to the guest house is usually covered, not necessarily for hygienic purposes, but for the fear of being 'breathed in' by onlookers. This secretive attitude towards food is usually inculcated into the children when they are old enough to be able to know when to stop eating or postpone it, if a visitor suddenly comes to the house. It is not surprising to find food as one of the major interests in children's lives in a community which divides the year into the seasons of richness and plenty, referring to the times immediately after the harvest, while [805] those times preceding it are called seasons of hunger.

852 304 The greatest experience that the child undergoes during childhood is circumcision. The boy is usually circumcised between the ages of three and six, and his circumcision is accompanied by a ceremony which is justified on religious grounds. The adult public celebration of the occasion consists of communal feasting of all the male relatives and friends invited on the evening previous to the evening of the rite, while the female relatives partake of a meal in the house. In the case of a girl's circumcision, the celebration is confined purely to women, and no man, not even the father, is expected to participate, or to show an interest in it.

Before the actual celebrations of the ceremony, the boy who is to be circumcised is taken round the village with a group of his age-mates and older boys, inviting relatives and friends in their houses to join the celebration of the occasion. Sometimes the invitation is oral, and sometimes by handing over a written invitation.

The day of circumcision arrives, and as expected during the evening communal meal, boys would be eating from separate trays apart from the [264] adults, while some of them would be serving the rest of the guests by fetching more bread, or more vegetables, and washing hands before and after the meal, while an adult would be chosen to distribute the meat from a common dish. The meal would end with the reading of 'Fatiha' to render the event successful, and expressed hope that the guests might one day attend the child's marriage ceremony, and blessings invoked for the parents and the family. The meal would be followed by reciting parts from the

[1] See Chapter I.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

in number, sometimes of different colours, are procured, and a different name is inscribed on each. All these candles are lighted at once, and the name on the candle which burns the longest is the one eventually bestowed on the child. After it has received a name the birth is entered in the Government archives, the name of the child's mother only being given; the father's name is not entered at all.

Boys are more highly valued than girls, and special precautions have to be taken when a male child is born to protect him from the evil eye. Sometimes the midwife is bribed to keep the sex of the child a secret, and if she is paid a sufficiently large sum of money she will consent to give out to the villagers that the child is a girl. I was told of a case of a woman who had given birth to a boy not knowing the sex of the child until it was thirty days old or more, and her husband was equally ignorant.

As a further protection from the evil eye a boy is often dressed as a girl for two years or so, all the villagers, presumably, being led to think that the child is a girl.

Women are supposed to suckle their children for two years, but if a woman again conceives before the end of this period she must, of course, wean her last-born child. When this happens she hangs a 'date of jealousy' round the child's neck to prevent its being jealous of the baby when it is born. I once witnessed a most frantic display of jealousy on the part of a very young child when he saw his mother with the newly arrived infant in her arms. He flung himself upon her in a fury of envious rage. The 'dates of jealousy' in some parts of Egypt are acorns; in other parts they are made of a kind of earth moulded into the form of a date stone.

If a child cries very much the mother will sometimes purchase a very small copy of the Ḳorān and hang it round the child's neck. It is believed that if the child begins to cry and then looks at the Ḳorān which it is wearing it will immediately stop weeping. Such small editions of this sacred book are also worn by a child to keep it well and to ensure its living. When used for this purpose the book is sewn up in a cotton case.

If, after long waiting, a woman at last bears a son a festival, or *mūlid*, is held. There are various kinds of *mawālid* (plural of *mūlid*) held for different reasons and on various occasions, and among them is that held in celebration of the birth of a son. It is a kind of thanksgiving on the part of the parents, and is also

Barrenness, they believe, sometimes arises also from the entering in unto the mother of a woman who has weaned her child. The " cure " in this case, according to their statement, is for the barren woman to carry a rag of wool wet with the milk of a woman who has recently weaned her child.

XXIII

THE ḲARÎNA

THE Bedouins name this the " Heat " (*Ḥarāra*). This name is used generally for the class of diseases of the throat (the original symptom of which is difficulty in breathing) such as diphtheria (*ḵẖunnāḳ*) and convulsion and drying up of the uvula, and the like. The " prescriptions " of the " old wives " are self-contradictory in regard to its " cure." Some of them think that the correct thing is cauterisation [p. 49] of the child upon its frontal and terminal crown (*yāfūḵẖ*). The child, however, finds relief from their folly, inasmuch as there is soon set up inflammation of the brain (meningitis), of which it dies.

" And he who does not die of cautery will die of something else ;
The " prescriptions " are many but the death is one."

Others again hold to the belief in replacing the cauterisation by scarifying with a razor instead, on both sides (front and back). This is the method followed by the Bedouin. The Arabs of Mariūṭ and al-Ḥāgir instead of all these, bore two holes in the child's ears through which they pass a thread of red silk. The " old wives " have different absurd theories as to the cause of this disease in children. Some of them claim that every male child has a sister (*ukẖt*) among the Jinn,